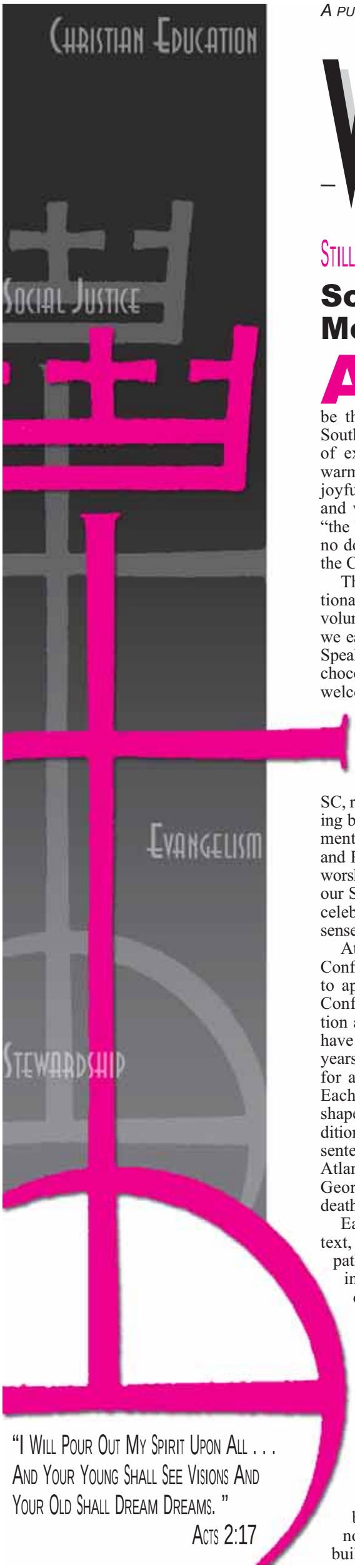
A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Voices & Visions

Abiding in Christ, Abounding in Hope

August/September 2007 Section B



Still Speaking, Still Building!

Southeast Conference Charts New Direction at Annual Meeting and Celebrates "The Ties That Bind" June 7-9

A leader of our Conference was heard to exclaim at our Southeast Conference Annual Meeting, "this has to be the best Annual Meeting ever!" The Southeast Conference has a long tradition of excellent preaching, uplifting music, warm Southern hospitality, good food, and joyful fellowship at our annual meetings, and we would not want to proclaim one "the best" over another. However, there is no doubt that the 41st Annual Meeting of the Conference in 2007 was memorable.

The hospitality of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, was effusive, with a volunteer around every corner to make sure we each got to where we were going. Still Speaking products and fair trade coffee and chocolate were available for sale; signs of welcome and direction were everywhere.

The music in our worship Friday evening and Saturday morning, provided by the sanctuary choir of Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, and Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC, respectively was inspiring. The preaching by Tim Downs at the TAP Commencement Thursday evening, General Minister and President John Thomas at our opening worship Friday evening, and Donna Allen at our Saturday morning worship challenged, celebrated and sent us forth with a new sense of who were are and whose we are.

At our business meeting on Saturday the Conference delegates voted without dissent to approve the 2007 final budget of the Conference. They approved the Constitution and Bylaws of the Conference which have been under development for over four years, as well as the next step in planning for a conference wide capital campaign. Each of these decisions will significantly shape the future of the Conference. In addition the delegates passed a resolution presented from Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, to ask Governor Sonny Purdue of Georgia to declare a moratorium on the death penalty in the state of Georgia.

Each of our preachers using the same text, Ephesians 2:17-22, took different paths in their reflections on it. Celebrating the graduation of two TAP (Theology Among the People) classes — one from Midway Congregational UCC, Midway, GA, and the other from Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA — Tim Downs invited us to look back at our rich history of advocacy for peace and justice in the Southeast Conference and to live into a future where we continue this God given vocation. John Thomas issued a call to renewal, reminding us that no number of "how to" books can rebuild a church and quoting the Psalms, noted, "Unless the Lord builds it, we build in vain." Donna Allen, recently ap-

pointed Assistant Professor of Worship and Homiletics at Lancaster Theological Seminary, called on us to be a people of open and extravagant hospitality to open our hearts to "the strangers and aliens," welcoming them as "citizens with the saints."

On Thursday evening, following the Annual TAP Banquet at which John Thomas provided thanks and congratulations to the TAP students; we adjourned to the Commencement at which ten TAP participants graduated.

We also took time to remember two TAP participants from Midway Congregational UCC, (Gladys Harris and Lillie Gillard) who had passed on before completing the TAP program. The graduates were presented with their Certificates of Completions by Dr. Thomas, as well as a gift of a silver UCC cross. The students had a surprise presentation of gifts to Rev. Kathy Clark the Director of the TAP program in thanks for her inspiration and instruction over the years.

Friday, the TAP convocation featured John Thomas and Dr. Ed Aponte. Rev. Thomas spoke about the marks of a denomination moving from being a "respectable religion" to becoming an "evangelical faith". He encouraged us to be a people less concerned with rules, and more concerned with our love for God and for neighbor. We are being led to a vigorous voice on behalf of the marginalized, against arrogance, a people who dare to laugh, dance and praise.

Dr. Ed Aponte reminded us that the Christian faith that is growing more rapidly in the Southern hemisphere than in the North, and that we in the United States are becoming a nation in which people of color out number those who are white. This growing diversity is a blessing bringing many gifts with it. We are indeed becoming a global village of many voices cultures and traditions. As a denomination we will be strengthen and made more dynamic by our capacity to embrace this change.

At the end of the business meeting on Saturday, we took a moment for recognitions of noteworthy passages in the life of the Conference. Gerri Ryons Hudson received recognition for her tenth anniversary of service with the Southeast Conference, Will Rabert, who has announced his retirement as the Coordinator of DART (the Disaster Assistance Relief Team) of the Southeast Conference after seven years of service, and Jim Crabb was recognized for three years of service as Treasurer of the Conference.

In all it was a wonderful Annual Meeting and we give thanks for the many people who worked tirelessly to make it happen with grace, efficiency, and fun. Our 2008 Annual Meeting will be hosted by Pleasant Hill Community Church in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee — we look forward to seeing you there!

Reflections

By Mary Ellen Myers

Central's welcome was expansive,
Banner at Clairmont, reminding all that
"God is Still Speaking."
Registration signage not to be missed,
Natural beauty of our spaces,
sanctuary graced with peace plants,
candles, fount, oil, Bread and cup,
flowing water cloth.
The commons filled with books from
Cokesbury, Uplands, Plymouth Harbor
displays, Fairtrade coffees, Cookbooks,
GISP shirts for sale.
Meals catered by Billy Williams,
friend of Central.
The ever-present Fairtrade Coffee,
many pots refilled, Worship spirit-filled,
singing from the heart, Choirs from Victory,
conference choir blending, energizing,
The Word read, then preached
by The Rev. President, John Thomas,
on This Old House, on renewal through
touching, blessing others.
Business conducted with humor,
recognition given to those
who serve, retire,
Central's Jim, Bob, Nancy,
lay members of the structure,
Tim, Kathy, staff,
The offerings for this year's General Synod,
twice the goal received,
Thankful outpouring of generosity,
Hallmark of Southeast Conference Annual
Meeting 2007.

Mary Ellen Myers, poet and volunteer, is a member of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta and lives in Alto, Georgia.

Grace to you and peace. . .

FROM THE CONFERENCE MINISTER

Dear Friends,

What a season of gatherings! The month of June, 2007 felt like an extended family reunion and, in many ways, it was. In the beginning of June the Southeast Conference came together for our Annual Meeting in Atlanta, hosted by Central Congregational UCC. Less than two weeks later we were in Hartford, Connecticut for General Synod XXVI, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the United Church of Christ. Both occasions were extraordinary outpourings of joy, celebration, and challenges to us to map a creative and faithful course into our future. Both occasions also were moments to pause and remember… re-member… explore our connections which weave us together into precious covenants across our beloved United Church of Christ.

"We are not alone but have a family of faith across the face of this nation. . ."

At our Annual Meeting we celebrated our relationship with the national church by welcoming General Minister and President John Thomas, who provided not only our opening sermon, but a key note address as a part of the TAP convocation. We then lifted up our growing relationship with Lancaster Theological Seminary in welcoming two of their faculty, Dr. Ed Aponte and Dr. Donna Allen. During our business meeting, which was uncharacteristically smooth, we passed, without dissent (!), a new Constitution and Bylaws for the Conference which will help us live into our relationship with the restructured national church with greater intentionality and clarity. We also approved the next steps toward a capital campaign in the Southeast Conference which names the support of global and national mission in addition to the essential ministries of the Conference to say "we belong to this family of faith."

There are times when we as one of the smallest conferences of the UCC can feel isolated, our churches scattered from one another. I received a call from one of our pastors vacationing in New England following General Synod who said, "I have taken so many pictures of UCC churches, there are so many up here!" There are many more indeed than one will see driving across the Southeast Conference. And yet, small and scattered as we are, these family gatherings — our Annual Meeting, the General Synod — are delightful reaffirmations of the fact that we are not alone but have a family of faith across the face of this nation and around the globe who with God join us in the "struggle for justice and peace… (and are present) in trial and rejoicing." Thanks be to God!

Peace,
Tim Downs
Timothy C. Downs, Conference Minister

Southeast Conference Has Strong and Vital Presence at General Synod XXVI in Hartford

Of the over 10,000 people who attended General Synod in Hartford Connecticut, 83 were from the Southeast Conference. Held from Friday, June 22nd through Tuesday, June 26th, the Synod was an explosion of joy and events celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the United Church of Christ. Among the people from the Southeast Conference were six delegates, a number of TAP participants present to learn about General Synod, youth, our staff, and significant numbers of clergy from Pleasant Hill, TN, Atlanta, GA and other locations. The six delegates represent a doubling of the number of delegates from the Conference, a recognition of the growth in numbers of members and congregations in the Southeast Conference in the last four years.

Rick Grimes, Gwen Thomas and Roy Bain served as delegates representing the Southeast Conference.

Our Conference has a significant and growing leadership role within the United Church of Christ, as was evident at General Synod. Marvin Morgan, on the staff of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, was elected Moderator of General Synod XXVII, to be held in 2009 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Lucia Hulsether, age 18, a member of Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville, was elected Southern Regional Representative to the Council for Youth and Young Adults (CYYAM) of the UCC. Associate Conference Ministers, Cameron Trimble and Kathy Clark were each called upon for program leadership in their areas of specialized ministry at General Synod. Cameron worked with national staff in programming for new church developers, and Kathy consulting around judicatory based theological education. Many of you are aware of the leadership provided by Gerri Ryons Hudson to the UCC Office Support Staff Network. In addition, Rev. DaVita McCallister, recently ordained in the Southeast Conference at First Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, who went to serve on national staff last year, preached the opening sermon for General Synod. Ty Davis, a TAP student and member of Holy Trinity Community UCC in Nashville, received special mention in the *UCNews* General Synod special edition for the T-shirt from his congregation which read "Will God judge me for loving or judge you for hating?"

Delegates and TAP participants gather with Rev. Marvin Morgan of 1st Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA who was named the next Moderator of General Synod 27.

Those attending General Synod were overwhelmed with opportunities to renew old friendships from across the years, exceptional speakers, programs, and worship services. Of the speakers, Bill Moyers, known to many of us from his various programs on PBS, and a member of the UCC, was particularly exceptional. Eloquently laying out the ideals that have shaped our American democracy and the values that under gird us as a Christian denomination, he noted the forces that are attacking our faith and political foundations. He reminded us that we, the United States, are a nation, and the UCC, a denomination, under siege. He called on us as a church of conscience to take the lead in challenging the "powers and principalities," noting that a small determined people of conscious can turn a nation around (to download his speech, go to: http://www.ucc.org/news/significant-speeches/). While there were numerous speakers, some of note included the following: The preacher for Saturday evening, Auxiliary Bishop Peter Rosazza of the Archdiocese of Hartford, years ago worked with Conference Minister Tim Downs when he and Tim were in ministry in Waterbury, Connecticut; Maria Otero, who has inspired micro lending to the poor across Latin America; and John Thomas, who preached for the worship service celebrating the 50th Anniversary on Sunday, called upon us to press toward the future to which God has called us, not shirking from the call, nor dwelling on our past.

Rev. Tom Warren hands out Baalam's Courier at General Synod 26.

VOICES & VISIONS

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Article ideas and submissions may be directed to the Conference Office

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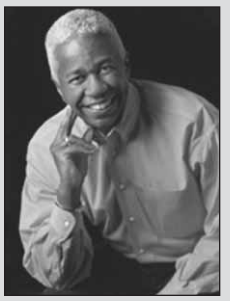
Leadership Development Seminar

Growing Vital and Relevant Churches

October 5-6, 2007
(please note that this date has changed from September to October)
Cost $99.00 — Friday, 6-9pm; Saturday 9-2pm at the SE Conference Office



Our national Still Speaking campaign has reminded us once again of the importance of making our churches warm and welcoming places for people to come both on Sunday mornings and throughout the week.

Facilitated by Ron Buford, the creator of our national Still Speaking campaign, this seminar will look at creative ways that every church — no matter what the size — can extend hospitality to those seeking a new church home. Examining the existing church structures, we will look at new ways of reaching out to the community.

- Marks of a Hospitable Church: Radical Welcome
- Follow up with Visitors
- Ideas around Branding
- Developing Community Connections

For more information and to register, contact Rev. Cameron Trimble in the conference office or email her at ctrimble@secucc.org.

Gathering Grounds for Kirkwood UCC

The SEC is Starting New Churches…

One year ago, Rev. Susannah Davis took a leap of faith. As a successful and highly respected UMC pastor known for her talent in revitalizing churches, Rev. Davis had enjoyed years of serving in fulfilling, transformational ministries in the Atlanta area. But in 2005, Rev. Davis heard God calling her to a new adventure in church planting. If this were not enough, she then learned of "this crazy, amazing church" called the United Church of Christ. A vision was born.

In June of 2006, Rev. Davis met with Rev. Dr. Timothy Downs, Conference Minister, and Rev. Cameron Trimble, Associate Conference Minister for Church Development, in the Southeast Conference office and told them that she had a dream of starting a church in Kirkwood, GA. She wanted this church to be deeply steeped in the values and identity of the United Church of Christ, a church which she understood to be committed to social justice, equality and radical hospitality. "Kirkwood needs the United Church of Christ, and the United Church of Christ needs the people of Kirkwood," said Rev. Davis.

The church would start out of a coffee shop she bought located in the heart of old, historic Kirkwood, just outside of the city of Atlanta. The coffee shop provides a natural connection to the community and a place to gather for worship, bible study and community activities. The coffee shop, named Gathering Grounds, would become the hub of the Kirkwood community, and Kirkwood United Church of Christ would be an extension of this gathering. Talk about an exciting vision!

In March of 2007, after completing extensive assessments and receiving the blessing of the SEC Board of Directors, Kirkwood United Church of Christ was born. Susannah had over 50 people in her first worship service, and participation has remained strong since then. This new church community has contributed in building a Habitat house, held an Easter sunrise service and egg hunt in a local park and hosted a booth at

the annual Kirkwood community festival. Rev. Davis says, "I know that I have been called to serve, and I know that God expects me to be authentic, to be the person that God has created me to be. I believe that in and through the faithful denomination of the United Church of Christ, God is making a way. That is who God is. God is always making a way for us to draw closer, to share compassion and love with our sisters and brothers."

Kirkwood United Church of Christ is making a way for many people in Kirkwood to connect to our God of radical welcome. If you would like to learn more about Kirkwood UCC or contact Rev. Susannah Davis, go to http://www.kirk wooducc.com.

Concerns and Celebrations

The General Synod delegates from the Southeast Conference reflected the diversity of our faith family. They were — **Vanessa Robbs**, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN, **Dorothy Gager,** Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville, TN, **Roy Bain**, pastor of Lanett Congregational Christian UCC, Lanett, AL, **Jeanne Elrod**, Pleasant Hill Community UCC, Pleasant Hill, TN, **Gwen Thomas**, Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA, and **Rick Grimes**, Victory UCC, Stone Mountain. Please feel free to invite any of these delegates to speak to your congregation about their experience.

Jeanne Elrod, Dorothy Gager and Vanessa Robbs gather at Synod

There were many people of the Southeast Conference who contributed to the leadership of the General Synod XXVI. They included the following: **Ted Braun**, a retired minister and member of Pleasant Hill Community UCC, who announced that after years of publishing *Balaam's Courier,* a daily publication during General Synod commenting on Synod, he will be retiring. He was assisted in this undertaking by **Tom Warren**, pastor of Pleasant Hill UCC. **Marvin Morgan,** on ministerial staff of the First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, was elected Moderator for General Synod XXVII in 2009, to be held in Grand Rapids, MI. **Cameron Trimble**, member of Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA., and Associate Conference Minister for Church Development of the Southeast Conference, assisted with programming for new church developers in the days preceding the Synod and was also a featured presenter during *Synod in the City.* **Walter Brueggemann**, member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, and retired Professor of Old Testament, was a featured presenter at Synod in the City, a series of programs scattered around downtown Hartford. **Ken Samuel**, pastor and founder of Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA, was recognized as the author of the best selling title of Pilgrim Press, *Solomon's Success, Seven Keys to Successful Leadership*, offered a workshop during Synod in the City, and was a featured preacher at a gathering of UCCAN, the United Church of Christ AIDS Network.

Also attending General Synod as delegates from the Boards of Covenanted Ministries of the UCC, where they each represent the Southeast Conference were the following: **Dorinda Broadnax**, a licensed minister in Montgomery, AL, and a member of Community Congregational UCC, and on the Executive Council of the UCC, **Gary Myers**, pastor of Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL, is on the Board of Wider Church Ministries, **Elizabeth Clement**, a member of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Office of General Ministries, **John Gill**, pastor of Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville, TN, who serves on the Board of Justice and Witness Ministries and **Sarah Kim,** co-pastor of Salim UCC, Roswell, GA, who is on the Board of Local Church Ministries.

Lilton Marks, a member of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, and recently retired from the Army chaplaincy, was granted a transfer of ministerial standing from the Georgia-South Carolina Association to the Eastern Virginia Association of the Southern Conference.

T. J. McGiffert, chaplain and a member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, announced that he has been accepted into a Doctor of Ministry program at the Interdenominational Theological Center of Atlanta, beginning in the fall of 2007.

"TAP" GO TO SYNOD

By Kathy Clark

Thanks to a generous grant from the Carpenter Foundation, the Southeast Conference was able to send ten members of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program to General Synod 26 in Hartford, Connecticut. Perhaps **Todd Liebergan** (Brookemade UCC, Nashville) summarized the experience best when he said, "Wow! Synod was too much of a good thing … an extraordinarily special celebration of our (United Church of Christ) 50th anniversary. I am very much looking forward to being in attendance at (General) Synod 27 in Grand Rapids, (Michigan)."

In all, over 24 people who are associated with the TAP program (as participants, graduates, facilitators, and friends) attended General Synod. The group gathered on Sunday morning of Synod for brunch to reflect on their experiences and to fellowship with one another. Many commented on the exceptional speakers of the Synod in the City event that took place the previous day throughout Hartford. **Bill Derstine** (Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill, TN) and his wife Dolly, who coincidentally celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary the week before Synod, exclaimed, "General Synod was a grand spiritual happening! To listen to and be confronted and … called to action by Bill Moyers, Barack Obama, John Thomas, and Marian Wright Edelman marked a high point in our lives in the United Church of Christ — all fifty of those years, in the UCC and in our marriage!"

Others were moved by the active presence of youth in the events. **Dorinda Broadnax** (Community UCC, Montgomery, AL), for whom Synod was "enriching, enjoyable, empowering, and embracing," recalled the challenge given in the sermon at the opening worship service by Rev. DaVita McCallister, the UCC's Minister for Youth and Young Adults. Broadnax noted that there were more than 1,000 young people in attendance. "It is my hope and prayer that the church will place into upcoming budgets (funds) to sponsor a youth at the 27th General Synod in Grand Rapids, Michigan," she said.

For many, worshipping with 8,000 other members of the UCC was a highlight of the overall experience. "I have never felt the Holy Spirit more than in worship in the Civic Center," said **Ty Davis** (Holy Trinity UCC, Nashville, TN). "All of the people praying and singing sent shivers down my spine. … It will be something I never forget as long as I live." For **Jennifer Spears** (Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC), "(General Synod 26) is already one of the highest moments in my life as a Christian. … I experienced nothing but continual insights and moments of startling beauty in … being a member of the United Church of Christ."

For those who are new to the UCC — and for those who have been members a long time — General Synod is an immersion experience in the covenantal polity, evangelical courage, and extravagant welcome that mark our church. "I am constantly thanking God for a denomination that is committed to social justice," acknowledged **Gwen Thomas** (Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA). "(The UCC) is willing to have the hard conversations about issues that so many churches avoid … I respect the spirit of unity and peace and discussions where persons can disagree agreeably." **Roy Bain** (Lannette Congregational Christian Church, Lannette, AL), who has served as a delegate to General Synod several times, noted: "There wasn't the polarization at this Synod as at previous Synods I have attended and that was refreshing." **Martha Lammers** (Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill, TN) made special note of the commitment to inclusion, "… 'up front' and in so many venues, of people of varied racial and national backgrounds, age spans, physical challenges … and for the emphases on children and youth throughout the Synod's programs." **Linda Asbury** (Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA), who is a special education teacher, affirmed the spirit of inclusivity: "It was heartwarming to see that people with disabilities were actively involved as Synod presenters on many different levels."

In addition to encountering the UCC as a national and international "family," for many the time spent with other members of the Southeast Conference on the shuttle bus, at morning caucuses, in informal conversations, even overnight in the Washington-Dulles airport (!), was particularly enriching. "I must say that I feel so blessed to have shared so much great fellowship with our group," said **Rick Grimes** (Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA). "Each individual from the Southeast Conference left a lasting impression on me that I will always cherish and be grateful for." **Jeanne Elrod** (Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill, TN) exclaimed, "Kathy (Clark) told me *before* Synod that she hoped I was as excited *after* Synod. The answer is YES! YES! YES! — even though I had to spend the night in the Washington … airport!"

General Synod is a "hands-on" learning experience for all who attend. Sometimes that learning is about the power of relationships — which is what being church is all about. For **Ginny Nixon** (Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill, TN) who has been a member of the UCC since she was six years old, General Synod 26 was an opportunity to recall the "… many times when the church was my home, my family, my teacher, my healer, my inspiration, my challenger — and always, my salvation. All those memories returned to me in Hartford as I joined in singing with all those others who had found a home in our beloved community, the community *We Would Be Building*. A lump rose in my throat and tears came to my eyes. That is the moment I will remember when all the other memories are gone." For **Kathy Lips** (Holy Trinity UCC, Nashville, TN), that learning was very personal. "Having been a UCC member for just a year now, I felt as though I wasn't quite sure of what I was a member of; (it was) as if the UCC and I were on a probationary period to see if we were a match. Now I know — yes we are!"

Kathy Clark is the Director of Theology Among the People (TAP), a leadership development program of the Southeast Conference for lay ministers. For more information about TAP, or to find a group near you, e-mail kclark@secucc.org or visit our website at www.secucc.org/TAP/.

2007 TAP GRADUATES

From Midway Congregational UCC, Midway, Georgia
Dorothy Mosely
Sallie Richardson
Deborah Robinson
Gladys Harris, In Memoriam
Lillie Gillard, In Memoriam

From Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, Georgia
Regina Drake
Rick Grimes
Barbara Sullivan
Tamara Wilson

From Community UCC, Montgomery, Alabama
Dorinda Broadnax
Maxine Ervin

From First Congregational UCC, Montgomery, Alabama
Michael Garrett

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

Mark your calendars with events of importance to you and your congregation.

AUGUST 6-8, 2007
Annual Conference Staff Retreat
Lake Martin, AL

AUGUST 13-17, 2007
Nehemiah Initiative NCD Training
Emory University, Atlanta, GA

AUGUST 17-18, 2007
Stewardship Leadership Development
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

AUGUST 22-25, 2007
Southeast Conference Pastors' Retreat
Mexico Beach, FL

AUGUST 29, 2007
UCC History and Polity Class
Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, TN

SEPTEMBER 5, 2007
UCC History and Polity Class
Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, TN

SEPTEMBER 7-8, 2007
Boundary Training for Church and Ministry Committees
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

SEPTEMBER 9, 2007
125th Anniversary Celebration
Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA

SEPTEMBER 10-11, 2007
Southern Regional Conference Ministers' Annual Meeting
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

SEPTEMBER 12, 2007
UCC History and Polity Class
Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, TN

SEPTEMBER 16, 2007
Conversations
Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN

SEPTEMBER 17, 2007
Georgia-South Carolina Church and Ministry Committee
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

SEPTEMBER 19, 2007
UCC History and Polity Class
Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, TN

SEPTEMBER 21-22, 2007
Southeast Conference Board of Directors Meeting
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

SEPTEMBER 26, 2007
UCC History and Polity Class
Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, TN

SEPTEMBER 28-29, 2007
Alabama Tennessee Fall Meeting
Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville TN

2007 SEC UCC Mountain Mission

15 Youth and Adults Travel to North GA for a Week of Service, Fellowship, and Fun!

Despite the hot weather and afternoon thunderstorms, volunteers from Pilgrimage UCC (Marietta, GA), Mt. Hope UCC (Julian, NC), and Pilgrim UCC (Durham, NC) spent four days working with Chiquita Berry at Twelve Stone Farm tending to long-standing projects she seldom has time (or resources) to complete herself. The team of 15 youth and adults were led by two trained site leaders in the building of a wood-framed workshop inside a barn and a rock wall around the cob chapel that watches over the farm.

Most of the group would agree that, although it was some of the hardest work they had ever done, the rock wall also was the most rewarding. Spanning over 200 feet and having to lay each stone by hand until it fit with the others like a 3D puzzle, each mission team member quickly realized the value of Chiquita's message about taking your time and allowing the process to be somewhat meditative. Hurried work yielded a wall that represented a project instead of a sanctuary, and each volunteer and leader took care to avoid such pitfalls.

When the final day was interrupted by rain, it was the youth who called for a return to the unfinished rock wall, undeterred by the weather, the deadline, or the weariness of their own tired bodies. And despite the smell of hamburgers and hotdogs on the grill down by the pond, the group continued until the last stone was in place. Because of their determination and commitment to a seemingly impossible task, the wall was completed, the chapel protected, and the doubters made into believers.

At the same time the rock wall was being constructed, a wood-framed workshop was being uniquely crafted inside a barn that once served as a place for washing hogs. With a slanted concrete floor and other obstacles in place, the site leaders measured, toiled, and taught the team members how to create a level and square room on a very uneven floor. The outcome revealed a 20' x 24' studded room complete with doors, windows, upstairs storage, and electricity. Surprisingly, while most people would prefer to work with carpentry than move 50-80 pound rocks, many of the volunteers requested to return to the rock wall to give their blistered hands a break from all the hammering!

Following each day's labor, the group returned to Fort Mountain State Park to replenish their energy with delicious meals prepared throughout the day by fellow team members. Evening activities run by the staff provided entertainment and continued fellowship.

The week's events culminated with a closing worship service held inside the Twelve Stone Farm chapel and surrounded by the newly completed rock wall. A Service of Communion, meditation, and singing helped tie the week of work and fellowship together with the ministry of Chiquita Berry and Twelve Stone Farm. It was a perfect ending to a truly moving week of love and labor.

For more information or to request a DVD of the week's events, please email Heidi Schuler, Mountain Mission Director, at hschuler@ellijay.com

Around the Conference

News from Local Congregations

▪ **Circular Congregational Church, UCC**, Charleston, SC, dedicated an education wing in May, funded with a loan from the Cornerstone Fund of the UCC. The wing, built over an ancient cemetery integrates old tombstones in its design. It is a "green building," designed to minimize its impact on the environment and, built of recycled materials, it has innovative design features, including a garden on the roof and a cistern to collect rain water that is used for watering the grounds. Circular, established in 1681 is the oldest Congregational church in the South.

▪ **Central Congregational UCC**, Atlanta, is preparing to celebrate its 125th anniversary in September. In May, the church recognized seven of its members who took a work camp to New Orleans to continue assisting the rebuilding of the city.

▪ In May, **First Congregational UCC, Atlanta** celebrated its 140th anniversary. Shortly following their celebration the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* had an article about the church. Their pastor **Dwight Andrews** was quoted in the article as saying, "We are called to be creative in addressing the vexing needs of global poverty and war, and issues of ethics and morals." The congregation is currently worshipping on the campus of Morris Brown College while its sanctuary is being renovated.

▪ At the Annual Meeting of the Conference in June, **Midway Congregational UCC,** Midway, GA, celebrated the completion of the *Theology Among the People* program after six years, by three of its members; **Dorothy Mosely, Sallie Richardson, and Deborah Robinson**. They remembered two of their number enrolled in the program who passed away before completing the course. They were **Gladys Harris, and Lillie Gillard**.

▪ **Victory UCC**, Stone Mountain, celebrated the graduation of four of its members from the *Theology Among the People* program; **Regina Drake, Rick Grimes, Barbara Sullivan, and Tamara Wilson.**

▪ **Community Congregational UCC**, Montgomery, AL, recognized two of its members who completed the *Theology Among the People* program earlier this year, **Dorinda Broadnax and Maxine Ervine**

▪ **First Congregational UCC, Montgomery**, AL, recognized that its pastor, **Michael Garrett,** graduated from the *Theology Among the People* program.

▪ **Unity UCC, Montgomery, AL**, received a $1,000 grant from UCC Justice and Witness Ministries Neighbors in Need offering for the justice work they are doing through Unity Academy.

▪ At General Synod XXVI, four new congregations in the Southeast Conference were recognized. They are **Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta,** led by **Susannah Davis**, **Unity UCC, Montgomery**, AL, led by **Bennie Liggins**, **Holy Trinity Community UCC**, Nashville, TN, led by **Cynthia Andrews-Looper, Sandy Creek UCC, LaFayette,** led by **Wayde Washburn.**